

Chovevai Tsion of Chicago Newsletter

A Voice of Reason in Modern Orthodoxy

Richard Chasman Editor

RCA Website Hacked

How else can you explain the strange statements on the website of the RCA (Rabbinical Council of America). It must be a plot to ridicule and destroy modern orthodoxy. On June 6, the following appeared on the RCA website:

Jun 6, 2013 -- The Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America reaffirm that any individual with firsthand knowledge or reasonable basis to suspect child abuse or endangerment, or the sale of illegal drugs, has a religious obligation to promptly share that information with secular law enforcement. Further, those deemed "mandated reporters" under secular law must obey their state's reporting requirements.

Lives can be ruined or ended by unreported child abuse or endangerment, or drug sales, as we are too often tragically reminded. The Torah's statement in Leviticus 19:16, "Do not stand by while your neighbor's blood is shed," obligates every member of the community to do all in one's power to prevent harm to others.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin, President of the RCA, and Rabbi Mark Dratch, Executive Vice President, received the following letter from Rabbi Israel Belsky, confirming his position reporting to civil authorities in matters of child abuse.

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Dear Rabbi Goldin and Rabbi Dratch,

It was a pleasure to meet with you the other day.

As we discussed, we all share a common concern in protecting children in our community from sexual or physical abuse. Though some have misunderstood my position, I completely agree that, given firsthand knowledge or credible evidence of or molestation, one should definitely go to the authorities. This is not only a theoretical position that I hold, but also one that I have personally implemented.

To cite one occasion, in Brooklyn several years ago a claim was made against a driver who transported children to a playgroup operated by his wife. There was a reasonable cause for suspicion – the child would wake up crying in the middle of the night and described the abuse – and I advised the parents to report the matter to the police. As it turned out when the police investigated they felt there was not enough actionable evidence to pursue a case. Nonetheless, I took the step of advising parents to not enroll their children in the playgroup and it ultimately closed down.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Yisroel Belsky

Little did the hackers realize that the position of the RCA is that those who suspect child abuse should go directly to the police without first consulting a rabbi. In the cited case, the parents suspecting molestation first consulted rabbi Belsky. There would be no halachic controversy if the bus driver were not Jewish. Surely RCA rabbis would have noted that there is no reference to the religion of the bus driver and would have insisted that the bus driver's religion be explicitly stated.

Secondly, in support of the hacking hypothesis, note that the alleged position statement of the RCA is totally

incoherent. There is no explanation as to why such a letter should be appearing as an RCA position statement, why there is a need for whitewashing rabbi Belsky and why the RCA is providing the whitewash

It didn't take long to discover why Belsky needs a whitewash (or some sprinkling with water containing ashes of a red heifer). A quick search of the web reveals that rabbi Yosef Kolko, who pleaded guilty in a child molestation case, was defended vigorously by rabbi Belsky. An AP article of May 13 describes the molestation committed by Kolko. It also notes the ostracizing of the victim's family by the Lakewood haredi community. The victim's father lost his job and moved to Michigan.

To make the Belsky Kolko connection, read the letter that Belsky sent to the residents of Lakewood (Dusznies blogspot article of May 24). There Belsky writes, '*My ears should have been spared hearing the horrific news that one of your fellow residents in town informed upon a fellow Jew to the hands of the secular authorities, may god spare us, for which the [Jewish] law is undisputed that one who commits such an act has no share in the world to come. (see: Choshen Mishpat 388:4)*'

'After conducting a thorough investigation I am absolutely certain that R' Y.K. [Yosef Kolko], may his light shine, is perfectly innocent of any wrongdoing of any nature whatsoever. And not only is he innocent but it is also as clear to me that all these allegations are fabrications made by [REDACTED].'

Belsky is not much of an investigator! Note that both the style and the substance of this Belsky letter differ markedly from the one posted by the RCA.

Even the hackers realized how unconvincing their RCA posting appeared so they placed another statement on the RCA website (June 12) to justify the June 6 statement. In part the June 12 statement reads, *'When asked for clarification of his opinion concerning the reporting of suspicions of abuse in general, Rabbi Belsky informed us that he favors the reporting of credible suspicions of abuse directly to the civil authorities without the need to seek prior rabbinic permission. Upon our request, Rabbi Belsky recorded this position in writing in a letter sent to us and publicized a week after our meeting. Many feel that this is a significant achievement.'* Belsky's letter to Lakewood makes a shambles of this rationale.

Please tell your friends that these statements were placed on the RCA website by hackers intending to destroy modern orthodoxy! After all, would any movement intentionally turn itself into a laughingstock?

The hackers are at it again. On June 17, the RCA released a statement from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin and from Rabbi Arye Matanky, president and vice-president of the RCA respectively, praising Rabbi David Stav.- the Tzohar leader who is running for Chief Rabbi of Israel. The letter condemned Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's vituperative attack on Rabbi Stav. Concerning the hooligans who attacked Rabbi Stav and the comments of Rav Ovadia Yosef that incited them, it reads, *"Is this Torah and are these its scholars? Woe to so-and-so who learned Torah, woe to his father who taught him Torah, woe to his rabbi who taught him Torah. So-and-so who learned Torah—look at how destructive his deeds are, and how ugly his ways are."* By June 18, the hackers had removed this statement.

We have also included articles on the situation in Turkey and Syria and the 'price tag' attack in Abu Ghosh.

Dusznies blogspot com May 24, 2013

RABBI YISROEL BELSKY'S LETTER TO THE RESIDENTS OF LAKEWOOD *My ears should have been spared hearing the horrific news that one of your fellow residents in town informed upon a fellow Jew to the hands of the secular authorities, may god spare us, for which the [Jewish] law is undisputed that one who commits such an act has no share in the world to come. (see: Choshen Mishpat 388:4)*

After conducting a thorough investigation I am absolutely certain that R' Y.K. [Yosef Kolko], may his light shine, is perfectly innocent of any wrongdoing of any nature whatsoever. And not only is he innocent but it is also as clear to me that all these allegations are fabrications made by [REDACTED].

Further, all the reports made to the secular authorities were only for the express purpose of casting blame for their [the victim's family] own shameful and cursed existence on others. And the truth is that the allegations

they make against others are crimes they themselves are in fact guilty of and they seek to cleanse their reputation by blaming an innocent man for their own deeds.

Accordingly, as it is a great mitzvah to rescue the pursued from the hands of the pursuer and to make it known that the righteous man is right and the evil man is evil-to rescue a pure and righteous soul. Therefore, anyone who has the ability to rescue the righteous and does not do so is considered as if he is himself the pursuer. (See: Rambam - laws regarding informing 1: 14)

Thus, all who have the ability to influence the informers that they should retract their terrible deeds should do so.

YnetNews June 18, 2013

US rabbis blast Rabbi Ovadia Yosef / Kobi Nachshoni

The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) is standing by Rabbi David Stav and slamming Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who called him "evil." In a letter published Monday night, the organization's leaders, on behalf of more than 1,000 members, expressed their "encouragement and support" for the moderate chief rabbi candidate, while harshly criticizing Shas' spiritual leader for lashing out at him during his weekly sermon on Saturday night.

"We trembled upon hearing the terrible things Rabbi Ovadia Yosef said in regards to his honor," RCA President Shmuel Goldin and Vice President Leonard Matanky wrote in Hebrew to Rabbi Stav, "and also when we heard of the events in Bnei Brak at the wedding of the daughter of Rabbi Rabinowitz," referring to a verbal and physical assault on Stav by ultra-Orthodox teens Sunday evening.

This is the most significant support Stav has received so far following the attacks against him, as the RCA is the largest organization of Orthodox rabbis in America. The letter praised Rabbi Stav, quoting Chazal (our Sages of Blessed Memory): "Look at how pleasant his ways are, how proper his deeds are."

Yet in regards to Rabbi Yosef, the US rabbis quoted contradicting statements: "Is this Torah and are these its scholars? Woe to so-and-so who learned Torah, woe to his father who taught him Torah, woe to his rabbi who taught him Torah. So-and-so who learned Torah—look at how destructive his deeds are, and how ugly his ways are."

They concluded by telling Stav that they were grateful for everything he had done "for the good of all the people of Israel, the Land of Israel and the State of Israel." They said they expected to work with him for many years "to expand and glorify the Torah, and to bring hearts closer to our Father in Heaven."

During his weekly sermon on Saturday night, Rabbi Yosef said that Stav, chairman of the national-religious rabbinical association Tzohar, was "an evil man" and that appointing him to the Chief Rabbinate was like bringing idolatry into the Temple. "I don't know Stav, I don't know this man, I haven't seen him, but all his friends the National Religious Party leaders come to me and say: 'Beware, this man is a danger to Judaism...' People in his party testified that this man is a danger to Judaism, a danger to the Rabbinate, a danger to Torah – and I should keep silent? They want to make him a chief rabbi? This man unworthy of anything! Can they do such a thing?"

The Tzohar rabbinical association issued a statement a harsh statement in response, referring to Rabbi Yosef's remarks as "incitement" and calling on him to "repent and ask for forgiveness after humiliating a person in public." Prominent religious-Zionist Rabbi Chaim Druckman told Ynet that Rabbi Yosef had gone too far and that he was "extremely shocked by the blatant remarks" against Rabbi Stav.

The battle against Rabbi Stav escalated on Sunday evening when he was attacked during the wedding of Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz's daughter. Rabbi Stav arrived at the wedding and was even seated on the dignitaries' stage alongside other rabbis, but when he got up to join the dancing circle, several haredi teens tried to get him to trip and kept swearing at him, calling him "evil" and "abomination." When he turned to leave the banquet hall they continued to harass him, shoving him and splashing water.

Yisrael Beiteinu Chairman Avigdor Lieberman, whose faction announced its support for Rabbi Stav as chief rabbi, said in response to the attack: "We expect a spiritual leadership, regardless of its outlook, to condemn decisively – and certainly not encourage – harm caused to a another religious leader."

According to Lieberman, "It's a shame that as part of a political race, and certainly for the position of chief rabbi, there are those leading the public to such dark corners. The Torah has 70 faces, and not a single one of them is of violence and incitement by one rabbi against another rabbi."

YnetNews June 17, 2013

Rabbi Stav attacked by haredi teens / By Akiva Novick

Words translated into action: A day after Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's scathing sermon against Rabbi David Stav, the moderate candidate for chief rabbi was assaulted by several ultra-Orthodox boys.

According to eyewitnesses, the teens shoved Stav as he was leaving the wedding of Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz's daughter in the central city of Bnei Brak on Sunday, called him an "evil man" and used additional quotes from the Shas spiritual leader's sermon. Some of the wedding guests said the national-religious rabbi had been targeted by the youths as soon as he had entered the banquet hall. When Stav approached the dance floor, Knesset Member Ariel Atias (Shas) immediately walked away.

"They tried to get him to trip while he was dancing and kept swearing at him," a wedding guest said. "At the exit, he was surrounded by dozens of people and some of them shouted at him 'abomination' and 'evil man.' There were others who were ashamed and apologized to him, but he was in a hurry to leave."

The incident took place following a harsh attack against Stav by Rabbi Yosef. The Shas spiritual leader called the moderate rabbi an "evil man" and "a danger to Judaism," adding that appointing him to the Chief Rabbinate was like bringing idolatry into the Temple. He also claimed that members of Habayit Hayehudi party had visited his home and spoken against Stav.

It was later reported that the before the sermon, Rabbi Yosef was pressured by his family members and Shas leader Aryeh Deri, who even presented him with liberal rulings issued by Stav in regards to watching women in the cinema and theater. Shocked by Stav's relatively permissive outlook, Yosef was promoted to issue the scathing attack.

On Sunday, before he was assaulted, Stav responded to Rabbi Yosef's remarks. "I am torn by the dividing atmosphere created around the elections. These are difficult days for me and my family," he said. The Tzohar rabbinical association, which is led by Stav, issued a statement referring to Rabbi Yosef's remarks as incitement and calling on him to "repent and ask for forgiveness."

The Shas spiritual leader's opinion is likely to affect the Chief Rabbinate race: Rabbi Yosef's harsh words have apparently buried the deal concocted recently by the associates of Rabbi Stav and Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar in a bid to guarantee their election as the two chief rabbis. According to the deal, Amar would "quietly support" Stav's nomination for Ashkenazi chief rabbi, and in return member of the national-religious Habayit Hayehudi party would vote in favor of a bill allowing Amar to seek another term as Sephardic chief rabbi.

Now, however, the rabbi members of the electing body are expected to obey Rabbi Yosef and vote against Stav. The person expected to benefit from the recent development is Rabbi David Lau, chief rabbi of the city of Modiin and the son of former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, who appears to be the leading Ashkenazi candidate at the moment.

Rabbi Amar suffered a heavy blow on Sunday as well, after the government approved the establishment of the Chief Rabbinate Election Committee, practically eliminating his chances of serving as Sephardic chief rabbi for a second term. After the appointment of the committee, the rules of the Rabbinate race can no longer be changed, meaning that the Knesset cannot enact a law allowing a chief rabbi to seek a second term.

Now that Amar has been forced out of the race, the leading candidates for Sephardic chief rabbi are relatives of Shas officials – Rabbi Avraham Yosef, the chief rabbi of the city of Holon and the son of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and Rabbi Yehuda Deri, the chief rabbi of Beersheba and the brother of MK Aryeh Deri.

Associated Press May 13, 2013

Rabbi Yosef Kolko, Ex-yeshiva Teacher, Admits Sexually Assaulting NJ Boy / By Katie Zezima

TOMS RIVER, N.J. -- With other accusers stepping forward, a former yeshiva teacher changed pleas Monday in the middle of his trial, admitting he sexually abused a boy he met while working as a camp counselor. Rabbi Yoself Kolko, 36, shifted uncomfortably on the stand as he pleaded guilty to aggravated sexual assault, attempted aggravated sex assault, sexual assault and child endangerment. The abuse occurred from August 2008 to February 2009. It ranged from fondling to oral sex and stopped when the boy told his father, who confronted Kolko.

The change in plea came after the prosecutor's office was contacted Friday by a representative for a woman who said she had been a victim of Kolko and a man who said he had a victim, Senior Assistant Prosecutor Laura Pierro said.

The case may be a watershed for the prosecutor's office and the Orthodox Jewish community in Lakewood, which has in the past been reluctant to bring criminal matters to civil authorities, preferring instead to handle them through rabbinical courts and senior rabbis. "I'm hoping that it's going to open the doors" to others in the community cooperating with authorities, Pierro said in an interview after the plea. "We broke ground with this case."

Prosecutors said they would not pursue the other two cases. Kolko's bail was revoked, and he was ordered to undergo psychiatric evaluation before sentencing. His attorney, Michael Bachner, said Kolko was "extremely remorseful," apologizes to the victim and hopes after treatment "to return to society as a benefit to it."

The plea came after only three of the prosecution's eight witnesses testified. The senior rabbi the father approached was due to testify, as were other members of the insular community who were expected to shed light on internal workings of Lakewood's Orthodox population and how such allegations were handled inside it.

When Judge Francis R. Hodgson asked Kolko if he had received any promises or was threatened or coerced in exchange for his plea, Kolko answered softly that there were things that were "not part of the court system." Bachner would not comment on Kolko's statement.

The victim's father had initially wanted the case handled within Lakewood's Orthodox community, asking a senior rabbi to help ensure that Kolko stay away from children and go to therapy. In mid-2009, the father decided to take the case to authorities. The Associated Press generally does not identify accusers in sex-crime cases and is not naming the father to protect the son's identity.

Testifying last week, the father said he went to prosecutors because he felt the case was not being handled appropriately. Kolko was still teaching and planning to work at the summer camp where he met the boy. "I was more concerned that he was still at his jobs," the father said Thursday. "And I felt that children are being endangered." The father acknowledged it is not common for members of the Orthodox community to take cases like this to law enforcement.

Prosecutors had said the boy's family was ostracized by the community for pursuing the case in state court. The boy's father, a prominent rabbi, lost his job and the family moved to Michigan. "There certainly were members of the community who remain outspoken against what the father did on behalf of his son," Pierro said. "I can tell you that there are many more whom are perhaps silently or not as openly are swelled with pride that he took this rather historic step."

The boy, who was 11 and 12 when the abuse took place, testified last week, describing a series of encounters

with the rabbi, including molestation and oral sex. The boy, now 16, said he was uncomfortable but wanted to remain close to Kolko because they were friends and the boy had no other companions in school. Pierro commended the boy's and his father's bravery.

Ocean County Prosecutor Joseph Coronato said that in "securing justice for the victim," prosecutors "have proven our ability to successfully intercede on their community's behalf, affording them the same protections under the law we so tirelessly apply to all Ocean County's citizens." "We will make every effort to assure this is a major step toward a continuing relationship with Ocean County's religious communities," he said. Kolko faced a maximum penalty of 50 years in prison and a \$650,000 fine, but the judge said he will likely cap one count at 15 years and run sentences on any other counts concurrently.

RCA Issues Clarification of Its Position on Abuse June 12, 2013

Jun 12, 2013 -- The RCA remains steadfast in combating and condemning all forms of abuse. We are encouraged by the process that led to the guilty plea of Yosef Kolko, an Orthodox Jew who pleaded guilty for the sexual molestation of a young boy. For many years the RCA has condemned the efforts of many parts of the Jewish community to cover up or ignore allegations of abuse, viewing these efforts as against Jewish law, illegal, and irresponsible to the welfare of victims and the greater community. The RCA strongly advocates, as a matter of Jewish law, the reporting of reasonable suspicions of all forms of child abuse to the civil authorities and full cooperation with the criminal justice system. The RCA decries any invocation of Jewish law or communal interests as tools in silencing victims or witnesses from reporting abuse or from receiving therapeutic and communal support.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin, President of the RCA, and Rabbi Mark Dratch, Executive Vice President of the RCA, concerned with the reported position of Rabbi Yisrael Belsky in the Kolko case met with Rabbi Belsky. Rabbi Belsky stated that based upon his knowledge of the case, which he explained at length, he deeply believes in Kolko's innocence. When asked for clarification of his opinion concerning the reporting of suspicions of abuse in general, Rabbi Belsky informed us that he favors the reporting of credible suspicions of abuse directly to the civil authorities without the need to seek prior rabbinic permission. Upon our request, Rabbi Belsky recorded this position in writing in a letter sent to us and publicized a week after our meeting. Many feel that this is a significant achievement.

The RCA appreciates that this distinguished scholar has gone on record with this position, a position that echoes the RCA's longstanding policy. We are confident that this statement will be helpful to many victims in the future. Nevertheless, due to the facts of the Kolko case as we understand them, the RCA disagrees with Rabbi Belsky's defense of this admitted perpetrator. We pledge to work toward the time when all victims of abuse will find strength, healing, and justice with the support of their communities, its members, and its leaders.

Hurriyet June 18, 2013

Turkish prime minister vows to increase police force

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that the government will be increasing the intervention force exercised by the police, regarding possible incidents related to the ongoing Gezi protests. "Within the authority the law provides, from now on, our police will not overlook any lawlessness, will continue to fulfill its duty. We will further strengthen our police. We will strengthen further in every way. So that we will increase the intervention power against these events," Erdogan said on June 18 in a speech at his ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) parliamentary group meeting.

Regarding the widespread criticism of the police's vast use of tear gas, Erdogan responded, "It is their most inherent right, they will. You will see that in the EU acquis communautaire. When you do not obey, the police use this authority." Erdogan took a step further in siding with the police. "What did they do? Did they shoot

bullets? Use bullets? No,” adding that the accusations of police violence were unfounded.

He also said they would be inquiring into who was behind the Gezi protests, arguing that it was all a massive conspiracy, prepared very professionally in collaboration with social media, companies, the interest rate lobby, media and some “internal traitors and external collaborators.” He added that their true colors had now been revealed.

“It was prepared very professionally,” Erdoğan said. “Social media was prepared for this, made equipped. The strongest advertising companies of our country, certain capital groups, the interest rate lobby, organizations on the inside and outside, hubs, they were ready, equipped for this.”

Erdoğan slammed the opposition, saying they are hiding behind vandals’ backs since they fell short on opposing within Parliament. Amid particularly slamming the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), Erdoğan was harsh regarding the party’s leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, arguing that he was not worthy to fill the post. Erdoğan accused Kılıçdaroğlu of acting like the head of a terrorist organization by calling on the police not to obey orders.

“From the public poll we have conducted, we have seen that those involved in Gezi Park events voted for the CHP by 76 percent and are their followers; 16 percent are from the BDP [Peace and Democracy Party]; 1.2 percent are from the AKP and 1.2 percent are from the MHP [Nationalist Movement Party]. This is the picture,” Erdoğan said, adding the CHP was involved in the protests.

Erdoğan also spoke about his power showdown at his two recent rallies. “Have those who continuously ask us whether we got the people’s message taken the message of hundreds of thousands in Sincan and over 1 million people in Kazlıçeşme?”

Erdoğan did not skip slamming the labor organizations that went on a strike on June 17 to protest against the police violence over the previous weekend in Gezi Park, arguing that the strike was “unlawful.” He once again implicitly pointed at Mehmet Ali Alabora, an actor who has openly supported the protests and been criticized repeatedly by the prime minister.

Erdoğan also said that those who promised him to evacuate the Gezi Park in negotiation talks, referring to two delegations he met in order to settle the unrest, did not keep their promise.

Hürriyet June 18, 2013

‘Standing man’ inspires a new type of civil disobedience in Turkey

A single man who started standing silently in the middle Istanbul’s city center has provoked a silent struggle across Turkey for the right to protest. The young man, later identified as performance artist Erdem Gündüz, stood in the same place without moving for eight hours on June 17, staring at the flag of modern Turkey’s founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the Atatürk Culture Center (AKM).

The police have been limiting access to the city center following the crackdown on Gezi Park protesters. Over the weekend, the police evacuated the city center to stop the Gezi Park occupation, which started three weeks ago against a controversial renovation plan, and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality planted trees and flowers in the park, which is closed to the public now.

“Clearing out Taksim Square [to pedestrians] as if nothing happened, planting trees in Gezi Park... Pretending as if nothing happened [in Taksim] is in fact the biggest violence,” he told the Hürriyet Daily News. Targeting both the media and the government, he said, “What happens in Taksim Square, in Dolmabahçe is not shown on television.”

Gündüz was soon joined by a group of around 300 fellow demonstrators, who all came to stand in silence beside him, staring in the same direction. He then left the scene right before police intervened against the protestors around 2 a.m. Ten people, who “insisted on standing” were taken into custody by the police and around 100 policemen were charged to wait right where he stood.

However, the protest was continued with other supporters on June 18 during the day. Despite the reactions, the police detained five more people.

News of the “standing man” began spreading on social media shortly after the act of defiance began, and the Twitter hashtag #duranadam (standing man) quickly became the world’s top Twitter trending topic.

Turkish Interior Minister Muammer Güler has said that the protest would not be subject to an intervention unless it began to constitute a menace against public order. “We don’t intervene against any protest that does not disrupt public order or affect life in general,” he said. “If it doesn’t turn into an act of violence, does not disrupt the public order and does not limit other people’s freedom, everyone has such a right [to stage a protest].”

Güler also said this protest shouldn’t affect traffic and also excluded the legitimacy of a protest in Ankara’s Kızılay that would continue from morning till night. “This is all about public order,” he added.

Union of Turkish Bar Associations head Metin Feyzioğlu also declared that the standing man’s act was not a crime according to the Turkish Criminal Code. Though the detention of a man who stands still on pavement would have a provision in the Turkish Criminal Code, the policeman would at least be guilty of “malpractice” or “restricting freedom.” “Standing” does not constitute a crime by any means,” he said, adding that there was no stance more democratic than this. “Humanity cannot find a more democratic type of protest,” he said.

In conformity with the remarks of the interior minister, “If a person does not block the traffic and does not break the public order, he can stand. The police cannot intervene,” Feyzioğlu said.

People across the country were quick to pick up the new protest, and hundreds of photos showing people standing still have been shared so far. The protest spread across the country hours after Gündüz’s launch.

In the western province of İzmir, a group of around 100 people blocked the traffic at Gündoğan Square around 2:30 a.m. in the morning, shortly after a ‘standing woman’ started standing in the middle of Kızılay Square in the Turkish capital of Ankara. A small group of people, including lawyers, also “stood” for more than one hour June 18 in the Istanbul courthouse in support of the “standing man.” Another man joined the action in the Aegean province of Muğla with an umbrella to protect himself from the 37 degree of temperature.

One photo showed people standing still in the Central Anatolian province of Sivas, in front of the Madımköy Hotel where 33 intellectuals and two hotel workers died when radical Islamists attacked the hotel on July 2, 1993. Another photo showed three people standing in front of the offices of weekly Agos, where Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was shot and killed on Jan. 19, 2007.

Associated Press June 19, 2013

AP EXCLUSIVE: US war games send signal to Assad / By Jamal Halaby (AP)

ZARQA, Jordan (AP) — Under the watchful eye of stern-faced American advisers, hundreds of U.S.-trained Jordanian commandos fanned across this dusty desert plain, holding war games that could eventually form the basis of an assault in Syria.

With the recent deployment of Patriot missiles near the Syrian border, and the mock Syrian accents of those playing the enemy, the message was clear: There is fear of spillover from the Syrian war in this U.S.-allied kingdom, and the potential for a Jordanian role in securing Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles should Bashar Assad’s regime lose control.

Dubbed Eager Lion, the 12-day exercise involves combined land, air and sea maneuvers across the country. It brings together 8,000 personnel from 19 Arab and European nations to train on border security, irregular warfare, terrorism and counterinsurgency.

Marine Corps Lt. Col. Duke Shienle said Syria “is a concern that all our regional partners share.” The Syrian crisis is “causing all military in the region to increase intensity,” he said as he supervised masked commandos

in black uniforms from Jordan and two other Syria neighbors — Iraq and Lebanon — in a mock exercise to free a hijacked aircraft on an airstrip in the eastern Jordanian desert.

Nearby, U.S. military strategists taught Jordanian riot police to quickly contain a mock protest by angry mobs in a crowded refugee camp. The trainers refused to name the camp, but the trainees said it was "Zaatari," a reference to a refugee settlement straddling the border with Syria that shelters around 185,000 displaced Syrians.

"We want freedom! We want a free Syria!" the trainees shouted, speaking the Syrian dialect as they depicted Syrian refugees. Others looked on from under dusty tents pitched on a strip of desert outside a Jordanian army compound. The location of this exercise and others could not be disclosed in line with Jordanian army regulations.

Elsewhere, in the south, hundreds of masked Jordanian commandos in black uniforms used machine-guns, rocket propellers and tanks to overwhelm an enemy target as Jordanian helicopters and fighter jets — all part of previous American donations — buzzed the skies overhead. "We want to tell anyone with malicious intentions toward Jordan that we can hit back where it hurts most painfully," said one Jordanian commando, speaking under scorching sun in the arid mountain region. He could not be named under army regulations and declined to say if the enemy he was fighting was Assad's army.

Other training focused on humanitarian relief and crisis management and involves 7,000 civilians from non-governmental organizations engaged in providing assistance to Syrian refugees, said Tawfiq Hennawi of the International Committee of the Red Cross, one of the participating NGOs.

Jordan hosts more than half a million Syrians who fled Assad's military onslaught and that number is expected to rise to 1.2 million by the end of the year.

"These exercises bolster our defense capabilities," said Jordanian army Maj. Gen. Awni Edwan, adding that the Eager Lion exercises, which end Thursday, are routine, having been held twice before at the same time. "We don't intend to attack anybody," he said.

Jordan has been leery that Assad may eventually use his chemical weapons against his neighbors, or if his regime starts to collapse, his stockpile may fall into the hands of al-Qaida or other militants who are trying to rise to power in Syria.

There has been mounting speculation that should Assad's regime begin to lose control, Jordan will dispatch its highly-skilled, U.S.-trained and equipped commandos to secure Assad's chemical weapons and create a safe haven for Syrian refugees along the 230-mile (375-kilometer) border with Jordan, according to a Western diplomat who monitors Syria from his base in Jordan.

The purpose is to prevent a further influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan out of fear that Shiite militants from the Lebanese Hezbollah group or other Iranian agents may slip across the border to destabilize this key U.S. ally, said the diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity because identifying him might jeopardize his intelligence-gathering on Syria. Jordan's predominantly Sunni Muslim population is traditionally a fiery critic of the growing influence of Iran and its rival Shiite sect.

Regional media reports this week suggesting that Hezbollah activists are deploying near the Jordanian border to help Assad regain control of southern Daraa province — which has been a lifeline for arms shipments to rebels seeking to topple him — sent jitters across Jordan. Officials said that security was immediately beefed up, with more Jordanian soldiers deployed along the border with Syria.

In recent weeks, Assad's forces have appeared to be regaining control over areas seized by rebels, particularly the strategic town of Qusair.

Jordan also fears that Assad's sleeper cells, including Hezbollah, may already be in the country and would act if instructed by Iran or Syria, where an uprising that started in 2011 has descended into all-out civil war.

Eager Lion coincides with Washington deploying one or two Patriot batteries along the border with Syria and

agreeing to keep a squadron of 12 to 24 F-16 fighter jets after the exercises — a move Syria's regime and its Russian patron have expressed concern over.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was quoted by Russia's Interfax news agency as saying that the deployment of the air-defense systems in Jordan in order to set up a no-fly zone over Syria would be a violation of international law.

The United States has said it has no plans for military intervention in Syria, although President Barack Obama has left the door open for any possibility.

"With this exercise being the biggest fire power show ever in Jordan, coupled with the deployment of Patriot air defense systems and U.S. fighter jets, it is clear that the ground is being set for military intervention in Syria," said Col. Khalil Rawahneh, a Jordanian military strategist who participated in at least 16 U.S. and British-sponsored maneuvers until he retired four years ago.

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100 protest in Abu Ghosh in wake of 'price tag' acts / Omri Efraim

Some 100 Jews and Arabs protested Tuesday in Abu Ghosh, where a 'price tag' act was perpetrated earlier Tuesday. The protesters cried out against the recent prevalence of "price tag" acts. Residents of the Arab town, which is adjacent to Jerusalem, found the tires of 28 cars were slashed and walls in the area were spray painted with slurs such as "racism or integration," and "Arabs out," overnight Tuesday.

Protesters carried signs reading "light instead of terror," and cried out "no to racism, yes to neighborliness." Among the protesters were MK Reuven Rivlin (Likud-Beiteinu) and MK Amram Mitzna (Hatnu).

"'Price tag' is an act of terror and should be treated as such," said MK Rivlin, adding that "terror is terror whether it's nationally, racially or religiously motivated. We can't keep paying lip service and address these incidents as marginal cases. Every time we keep silent in the face of 'price tags' we enable the next 'price tag'." The MK urged the Israeli government to address the issue, insisting that otherwise "we will all pay the price."

MK Mitzna told Ynet that the prevalence if the terror acts are a testament to the failure of the security forces. "When we protest, we are all Abu Ghoshians; all the residents of the State of Israel feel ashamed and betrayed. To the caption 'Arabs go home,' I say 'Terrorists go to prison'; because terror is terror and it's about time our leadership does more than offer condolences to the victims over the phone and utilize all its resources in order to nab the terrorists.

Motti Cohen, who lives nearby, told Ynet: "We heard about what had happened; we were appalled and couldn't believe it. I have friends here... and came here to let them know that what happened is unrepresentative of the State of Israel and this region. We support them and are ashamed; what happens to them happens to us."

Members of the Abu Ghosh youth basketball team, in which both Jewish and Arab children play, also arrived at the protest. "We've decided to cancel practice and bring the children to this protest to make them realize that the coexistence they implement every day is not at all obvious and that we must stand strong in front of many extremists who engage in inciting hate," the mother of one of the children said.

Isham Ibrahim, whose two cars were vandalized in the 'price tag' acts overnight, said "This demonstration makes us feel proud and strong. Our Jewish neighbors did not abandon us and made it here to support us."